



## **Friend: Secrets, Trading Cards, Promises** by ishiptoast

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**Summary:** "She thought about what Mike had said earlier, about promises, and how friends never broke them, ever. She silently promised to herself that she and Mike would always be friends. No matter what." Eleven's perspective on a few scenes from season one of Stranger Things.

## Friend: Secrets, Trading Cards, Promises

A/N: Confession time, I'm a teeny, tiny bit obsessed with Stranger Things. And okay, that's the understatement of a lifetime. Can you blame me? I am so in love with these characters that I just had to write about them. This is just a few drabbles from Season 1, all from El's perspective. ENJOY!

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The rain kept dropping faster and faster as her short legs tried to keep up. She didn't know where she was going exactly, except that it needed to be far away from *there*. Everything around her was unfamiliar. The trees, the grass, the dirt, they all screamed, "you don't belong here." And yet, instead of accepting their cries as unwelcome, she understood a different meaning: freedom.

Time passed, but she hardly noticed, her only thoughts still back at the diner. She kept seeing the bad men point the gun at the nice man with the long beard, who gave her ice cream, and taught her what it meant to smile; she couldn't help but feel so *guilty*. This was all her fault. She was the monster. She knew that Papa would agree.

By now, she was soaked to the bone, the heavy droplets falling from the sky disguising the tears falling from her face. She didn't know what she was supposed to do now, only that she couldn't go back to that place. She looked around for any sign of respite, but nothing was forthcoming, and she knew that if she didn't find cover soon, she would be found-found and taken away again.

"No," she muttered out loud, the one word with which she was most familiar. No, she would never go back. Not to that prison cell. She didn't care how scared she got, how alone she felt. She'd never surrender back to those wretched walls.

It was right about then that she heard the low noises that she guessed were people arguing. Fear overwhelmed her. But before she could react, the beam of a shimmering light exposed her lean figure, and she was looking into the alarming eyes of three young boys.

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"Friend."

They explained the concept to her, which seemed simple enough.

\*Secrets

\*Trading Cards

\*Promises

But she wasn't sure if she quite understood what it meant. "*Friend.*" All she knew was that she liked it. She liked having a friend. When Mike looked at her, she didn't feel scared, or alone, or useless. Papa didn't treat her like a friend. But Mike did.

She smiled up at him as they ran across the lawn, racing to get on their bikes. She thought about what Mike had said earlier, about promises, and how friends never broke them, ever. She silently promised to herself that she and Mike would always be friends. No matter what.

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She watched as the three boys sat around her, arguing about something she didn't fully understand. All she could figure out was that they were worried about their friend Will. When all three sets of eyes regarded her, she knew something strange was about to happen.

First it was the makeup, then the wig, then the dress: all things to help her "blend in", whatever that meant. She took a deep breath before walking through the door, feeling nervous for some reason. Would their plan work? Would she be able to pretend to be normal, so she could communicate with Will in the Upside Down? She wasn't sure, but she knew she had to try.

Once she entered the hallway, she watched the eyes of the boys follow her movements. "Wow. She looks...", Dustin began.

"Pretty," Mike stammered. El smiled, knowing that pretty was a good thing. It was something friends told each other. "Good," he added, shrugging his shoulders. "You look pretty good."

With that, Eleven walked over to the mirror, wanting to see her

reflection. She saw the long blonde hair hang from her shoulders, hair she hadn't seen on herself in a long, long time. She gazed at the way the dress fell on her lean figure, the makeup highlighting her face. She smiled up at her reflection when she realized that, frankly, she didn't look like herself, and that was the best surprise of all.

"Pretty good." She agreed.

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When she first heard the screaming, Eleven honestly didn't know if it was emitting from inside her mind or not. The inward chaos had started ever since she ran away. It wasn't that she meant to lie to her friends, breaking her number one rule, but she knew she had to keep them safe. And really, omitting the truth wasn't the same as lying, right? Still, El's guilty conscious was eating her alive. She could still see Mike's face tied to the words *WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!* What was wrong with her? *Everything*, she thought. *Everything is wrong with me, because I am the monster.* That thought kept repeating over and over in her mind, to the point that she could hear nothing else. *I AM THE MONSTER I AM THE MONSTER I AM THE MONSTER.* It was this reason that she almost missed the screaming and fighting she heard in the woods, convinced it was coming from her own mind. But when she heard a voice shouting, "Let him go! LET HIM GO!" she knew this was more than her internal battle.

"Mike," she whispered, and then ran to the quarry.

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"THAT'S RIGHT, YOU BETTER RUN! SHE'S OUR FRIEND, AND SHE'S CRAZY! YOU COME BACK HERE AND SHE'LL KILL YOU! YOU HEAR ME? SHE'LL KILL YOU!"

It was at Dustin's words that El had collapsed, enveloped in the past as she remembered how she had been the one to open the gate, the cause of all the hell they were going through. She was responsible for so much death and pain, it had crumpled her, and she couldn't take it anymore. Now that Mike was in front of her, asking if she was okay, she couldn't help but just sob.

"Mike, I'm sorry." As much as she couldn't bear the thought of losing Mike, she knew she had to tell him the truth, that Will was gone

because of her.

"Sorry?" He asked, "What are you sorry for?" He was looking at her with such a gentle expression that it made it even harder to get the words out.

"The gate...I opened it." She took a deep breath. "I'm the monster."

She waited for him to shrink away from her, to recoil in disgust, but instead he moved closer to her, saying that no, she was not the monster, she had saved him. He kept repeating it, demanding her acknowledgment. "Do you understand? You saved me." Did she understand? She wasn't sure, because she still felt guilty, still felt responsible for her friends' problems, but then Mike was pulling her into his arms, and Eleven remembered that friends don't lie, and if Mike still wanted to be her friend, even after the terrible things she had done, then she knew he must be right. She had saved him, and he had saved her, and all she wanted was to have the feeling of his arms around her last forever.

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"Will you be like my brother?"

It was a fair question, or so she had thought, but the rapid shake of Mike's head suggested that the idea was ridiculous. "What? No, no!"

"Why no?" She was honestly trying to understand. If Nancy was going to be her sister, why was Mike not going to be her brother? She was really starting to get tired of not understanding things. He went on to explain that it was different, but that didn't make sense to her either. She furrowed her brow in confusion, not sure what to make of this all. Still, she felt good just talking to Mike, knowing that he was still trying to protect her from the bad men.

"I was thinking, well...I don't know, maybe we can go to the Snow Ball together."

"Snow Ball?"

"It's this cheesy school dance where you go in the gym and dance to music and stuff." He explained. "I've never been, but I know you're

not supposed to go with your sister."

Again, that confused El. She didn't see why you wouldn't go to something that sounded like fun with your sister. "No?" She asked innocently.

He refuted that you could, but that it would be really weird; you should go with someone that you like. El didn't know why it would be weird, but she tried another tactic. "A friend," she suggested. A friend was someone you liked, that much she had learned. But Mike still didn't look satisfied with her answer. It seemed that he was desperately trying to grasp for words he didn't have.

"Not a friend, uh, uh, someone like a..." He paused, thinking.

All of a sudden, Mike did something that she could only describe as strange. He leaned in and touched his lips to hers. She was surprised, not exactly sure what it meant. But she felt good when he did it. It was quick, and when he moved back, she smiled, a little breathless, though she wasn't sure why. He smiled back, but looked away, embarrassed. She guessed that this lip touching thing was what happened when friends liked each other enough to go to this Snow Ball dance together. The thought made her happy. In fact, she kind of wanted it to happen again. But the headlights shining through the window signified that there wasn't time.

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The flickering lights were distracting, but she welcomed the distraction. After everything that had happened that day, she could use a diversion from the pain. She was too exhausted to pay attention to what was going on around her, but she knew that someone was carrying her, away from *them*, away from Papa, away from the bad men. A moment later she was being set down, and there was Mike, grabbing her hand and saying things, things she couldn't really understand, between the noise, the exhaustion, and her usual lack of comprehension. Something about the bad men. But then he was talking about a bed, and how she would have eggos, as many eggos as she could want! And...and... "We could go to the Snow Ball."

El thought about the last time they talked about the dance, when Mike had done that weird thing with their faces touching, and how

nice it felt. She wanted to feel that nice, safe feeling again, instead of the commotion around her. She knew the demogorgon was near, that safety was just an illusion, but still, she yearned for it. "Promise?" She asked, demanding an impossible obligation. But still, unlikely as any sort of happiness was at this point, she needed to hear his answer.

"Promise." He muttered.

Eleven couldn't tell you the details of what happened after that, everything was a blur. When the demogorgon finally came for them, all she knew was that she had to save her friends. "*Friends don't lie*," she had been taught. She knew that the only solution to their problem was her sacrifice. And she was ready. She leapt off the table with as much energy as she could muster. Before she knew it, the familiar trace of blood marked her skin, the sign of her gift.

"No," Mike yelled, but El pushed him aside with her mind before he could interfere. This was her mission, and she was doing this alone. She walked slowly, steadily, with her hand raised and eyes locked on the monster. She crossed the length of the room, but paused, and looked back at her friends.

She met the eyes of the boy who had found her, protected her, and though she may not have understood it then, had loved her. With one last glance she said the words that would come to haunt them both. "Goodbye, Mike."

Her scream iced the room, and the electricity bristled. The screeches of the demogoron didn't deter her, but strengthened El's resolve. The fight was over. With one last jolt, and before any of them could react, Eleven was gone.